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reading room AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Space explorer, entrepreneur publishes memoir

On September 18, 2006, headlines around the world touted **Anousheh Ansari** as the first female private space explorer and the first astronaut of Iranian descent. Anousheh captures her experience in *My Dream of Stars: From Daughter of Iran to Space Pioneer*. She collaborated on the book with **Homer Hickam**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *October Sky*. It opens "on a beautiful starry night" in the city of Mashhad, Anousheh's birthplace, and portrays a young girl who struggles to make sense of her war-torn country, but finds peace in the beauty of the stars. Her father longs for his daughter to find peace in "the land of opportunity," and Anousheh, whose name is Persian for "eternal," writes, "I like to think my name reflects the hopes and dreams of my parents for my future."

Anousheh immigrated to the United States as a teenager in 1983. She took ESL classes in high school, and later earned a bachelor's degree in electronics and computer engineering from George Mason University, followed by a master's in electrical engineering from George Washington University. After college, Anousheh began working at MCI, where she met her future husband, Hamid. She fell deeply in love and *My Dream of Stars* is as much their love story as it is Anousheh's love of the stars.

On working with Homer to write this heartwarming memoir, Anousheh said, "It was an interesting journey. I am one

of those people who don't dwell on the past, so in writing the book, I kept wanting to focus on my space trip, and Homer insisted that I start from the beginning so people understand where I come from. Having to go back to my childhood and relive some of those memories reminded me that no matter how bad things may get, there's always a tomorrow; there's always hope for change and for new solutions." She adds, "Everything I've been through has taught me lessons that I can use in my personal endeavors and in my business."

Anousheh is co-founder and chairman of Plano-based Prodea Systems, along with her husband Hamid and brother-in-law, Chief Technology Officer and

co-founder Amir Ansari. Prior to founding Prodea Systems, the three co-founded Telecom Technologies, Inc., which merged with Sonus Networks, Inc. in 2000.

Anousheh declares that there is nothing like their product on the market. "What we have developed is a unique product that is sold to service providers

(telecom and broadband companies) to make broadband easily accessible and to make it an enjoyable, simple experience," she said. "We know technology can enrich your life, but at the same time, people are oftentimes intimidated by it, and our goal is to show them that technology can help them manage their life."

In short, Prodea Systems offers an application delivery system comparable to an iPhone—one device that delivers multiple applications. You can control your TV, your PC, your mobile device, or any other network device with one unit. And, you can control all of these applications away from your home.



Co-founder/chairman of Prodea Systems
Anousheh Ansari. Profile photo/Brit Mott

Whether it was wishing upon a star or hard work and perseverance—and it was probably all three—Anousheh came closer to fulfilling her dream of space travel in 2004 when Dr. Peter Diamandis, founder and chairman of the X Prize Foundation, approached her about the X Prize.

The X Prize was formed to encourage the construction of a spacecraft that would fly private passengers into space. The first nongovernmental organization to launch a reusable manned spacecraft into space twice within two weeks would win \$10 million. Anousheh and Hamid agreed to insure the prize money, under one condition—after the spacecraft had gone commercial, they wanted the rights to purchase the first tickets.

By investing in space travel Anousheh believes she is investing in a greater cause—the environment. “Watching Earth, you think, If everyone could see this, they would go *out of their way* to protect it. You don’t see borders; there are no lines or walls separating us in space, so you realize that if we mess up one country, it affects the whole world.”

“Especially in this global marketplace everything carries,” Anousheh continues, making a correlation to business. “There is no country in the world that is self-sustaining. We have to make this a better place for everyone to live, and we have to think about global solutions.”

Visit anoushehansari.com. — BRIT MOTT

excerpt

From *My Dream of Stars*

Throwing off my belts, I was able to take a look through my tiny porthole of the capsule and saw Earth from space for the first time. My laughter stopped as tears welled in my eyes. I saw a small crystal float away from me. It was beautiful, a pretty little diamond. I wondered where it came from, if perhaps some worker had lost the stone from her ring. Then I realized it was one of my tears. It seemed to be attracted to the earth. It touched the glass in the porthole and became for just a moment the tiniest of rainbows.



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